TESTIMONY OF DR. BENJAMIN N. TUGGLE, CHIEF, DIVISION OF HABITAT AND RESOURCE CONSERVATION, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERIVCE, BEFORE THE HOUSE TRANSPORTATION AND INFRATSTRUCTURE SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT REGARDING THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER – ILLINOIS WATERWAY SYSTEM NAVIGATION FEASIBILITY STUDY

June 24, 2004

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommitte, I am Dr. Benjamin Tuggle, Chief of the Division of Habitat and Resource Conservation in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and have been the Department of Interior representative on the Principals Task Force for the Upper Mississippi River – Illinois Waterway System (UPR – IWW) Navigation Feasibility Study. I am pleased to appear before you today to discuss the Service's continuing effort to work with the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and other stakeholders to develop a proposal that includes measures to conserve and enhance the fish and wildlife resources of the region.

The Upper Mississippi River System (UMRS) is a globally significant ecosystem. There is a strong federal interest in this because of the major importance of the UMRS as an interstate, international flyway for migratory birds; its importance for federally endangered species; the interstate nature of fish and wildlife management in the system; and the large acreage of public lands (425,000 acres) including nine national wildlife refuges with 285,000 acres.

Since the early 1990s, the Service has worked with the Corps on the UPR-IWW Study. When this study was initiated, the sole purpose was to investigate navigation improvements on the Upper Mississippi River and Illinois Waterway. The Service's responsibility, under the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, was to assess impacts of proposed actions on the environment and recommend alternatives to minimize or avoid any adverse ecological effects. However, the Service (as well as state natural resource agencies) also advocated that the Corps needed to assess and mitigate the ongoing and cumulative ecological effects associated with operating and maintaining the existing Nine-Foot Channel navigation project. Although the existing Upper Mississippi River System Environmental Management Program (EMP) has been successful in restoring habitat at specific locations, a far greater level of

effort would be needed to reverse the system-wide long-term decline in fish and wildlife habitats.

In early 2001 the Corps suspended work on the original feasibility study to consider possible changes in the study purpose. A group of federal agency representatives was convened to assist the Corps' consideration of a new study direction. This Federal Principals Task Force was comprised of the Departments of Interior, Agriculture, Transportation, and the Environmental Protection Agency. The role of the Service in the restructuring of the study was to provide expert advice to the Corps on strategies and measures designed to enhance the ecological sustainability of the UMRS and to identify restoration opportunities.

A key recommendation of the Principals Task Force was to develop a comprehensive mitigation plan to address the effects of the operation and maintenance of the navigation system on the environment, as identified and quantified in the cumulative effects analysis. The restructured study reflects this recommendation.

The study resumed on two parallel tracks: one, to reassess the economic justification for navigation improvement measures, and a second to develop a comprehensive plan for restoring fish and wildlife resources affected by the existing navigation project. The restructured study added habitat restoration as an objective. Since the restructuring occurred, the Service has collaborated with the Corps and other river management agencies to develop alternatives designed to reverse the decline in habitat quality and achieve environmental sustainability throughout the UMR ecosystem. Many of the Service and State recommendations were included in the proposal that the Corps has presented in its draft feasibility report.

As the Corps has testified, ecosystem restoration is a long-term (fifty years and beyond) obligation. To address the ongoing and cumulative effects of the Nine-Foot Channel Navigation Project would require a long-term effort. The Service believes that such effort should employ an adaptive management strategy. Initially, such a program would emphasize the identification of needed habitat management measures through a combination of experimental project design and performance evaluation. We look forward to working with

the Corps and other partners in developing the management and institutional framework necessary for such a program.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared statement. I am pleased to answer any questions you or the Members of the Subcommittee may have.